JAMES HAMLYN WILLIS

A biographical sketch.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult for a modest, highly active and productive scientist with much to carry out still ahead of him, to pause and provide an account of the ground already covered. The age of retirement is a convenient marker in a man's career however, and in Botany the need to refer both to the professional work and the man in the context of that profession is so very great, that Dr. Willis was pressed for signposts to guide botanists, present and future, who have need to refer to his work. The details of the biographical sketch were supplied by Dr. Willis, but these have been re-cast and re-written by others.

HIS LIFE

James Hamlyn Willis was born in the home of a family friend, Nurse Trenery, in Neerim Road, Oakleigh, Victoria, on 28 January, 1910. His father Benjamin James Willis was the eldest son of a family of 16, four of whom had died in infancy, and at the time of James's birth held the post of teller in the Bank of Australasia at Yarram, South Gippsland, where he had served since July 1896. In January 1898 Benjamin Willis had married Mary Elizabeth Giles James, the eldest daughter of a Congregational clergyman Reverend T. H. James, in Rutherglen. Their first child, Rupert Allan, had been born at Yarram on Christmas Eve 1898 and named after the son of the family doctor and close friend, Dr. Lewis Birch. For the birth of her second and only other child Mary Willis travelled to Oakleigh to be attended again by Dr. Birch, who was then practising in that locality. After almost a month's absence from Yarram she returned there with baby James.

In October 1913 Benjamin Willis was promoted to Manager of the Bank of Australasia (now the A.N.Z. Bank) in Stanley, north-west Tasmania. He went there ahead of his family who followed a few weeks later in summertime, travelling overland on a long dusty journey by horse-drawn coach from the port of Burnie, some 80 kilometres south-east of Stanley. The coach took a whole day—now cars travel along the sealed Bass Highway in little more than an hour. James (always known as Jim) did not attend school until the age of nine. Instruction in the "three R's" (reading, writing and arithmetic), with some elementary geography, history and science was ably imparted at home by his father.

Muelleria 3 (2): 71-88 (1975).

In 1924 there was no secondary school within daily travelling distance of Stanley so Jim Willis, at the age of 14, went to board with the Eyers family at 9 Brenbeal Street, Balwyn, in Victoria, while he attended Melbourne High School—just as his brother had done eleven years before. He matriculated at the end of 1927 and, as an open-air life appealed more than an office job, he sat at the annual entrance exam for a three-year scholarship course in the Victorian School of Forestry, Creswick. He passed easily and commenced his training there early in February, 1928. Upon completion of the course in December 1930 he received his Diploma of the Victorian Forests Commission and was posted back to the Creswick district as a cadet field officer with the Commission.

At Creswick a stimulating companionship was forged at once with the Howie family—Charles P. Howie, a plumber, his kindly and motherly wife Annie, invalid son Malcolm and daughter Mavis. Four other older sons (Charles, Norman, Will and Reg) lived elsewhere but occasionally visited their home town which they all loved. The Howies' place at 64 Albert Street became a second home to Jim who spent many of his week-ends there and went on innumerable rambles with Mavis who, like himself, was a keen bush-lover. On 30th May, 1931 the engagement of Jim Willis and Mavis Howie was announced—it was Mavis's 25th birthday.

During October 1932 Willis was appointed to Belgrave, in the Dandenong Forest District, as assistant to the late James O'Donohue. A year later, on 13 October, 1933, he and Mavis were married. After a week's honeymoon at Wilson's Promontory they returned to live in Cockatoo from where Willis managed the Gembrook-Beenak-Tonimbuk end of the Dandenong Forest District. This was at the height of the great financial depression when one was lucky to have any kind of job. Willis's gross salary was only £3.10.0 a week, but prices were proportional and the couple managed to pay their way, renting a 5-room furnished house for the weekly sum of 15/-. Their first child, Ruth Anne, was born on 17 April, 1935.

In June 1936 Willis received an instruction to "report for duty" in five days' time at Maryborough Forest Office. He hurriedly uprooted his family and reached Maryborough on schedule. A house was located by the end of the first week there but just as the furniture was to be moved in he received a further instruction to proceed at once to Bealiba and take charge of that district. Furniture was re-loaded and moved on another 43.5kilometres to a forest officer's residence on the outskirts of Bealiba. Within three months, in September, another "instruction to proceed" transferred Willis and family to Daylesford, 26 kilometres by road from Creswick.

A year later Willis heard of impending retirements from the National Herbarium in Melbourne and this gave him the chance he was seeking to enter the field of professional botany. He immediately negotiated and was seconded on loan to the Lands Department by the Forests Commission for a short probationary period, after which a permanent departmental transfer was arranged. So, in October 1937 he began a period of distinguished service with the Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium that lasted for 34 years, until his voluntary retirement at the age of 62 on 28 January, 1972. His first appointment on the staff of the Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium commenced on the 2nd August 1939, as Assistant (Herbarium).

Soon after commencing work in Melbourne Jim Willis and his wife decided to settle at Brighton where they have remained ever since-for 16 years in one house on Durrant Street and for the past 21 years at 102 Male Street. Their second child, Ian, was born on 30 December, 1937, and the three subsequent children (David, Helen and Dorothy) were all born at the Brighton Community Hospital. Willis attended the University of Melbourne part-time for lectures and practical classes during 1938 and 1939 and qualified for the Bachelor of Science degree (with honours) which was conferred on 13 April, 1940. At the National Herbarium he received successive promotions and in 1958-59, he spent 14 months abroad as Australian Botanical Liaison Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England. In May 1961 he was promoted to the position of Assistant Government Botanist, and for the last 15 months of his service he was Acting Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium until a new Director could be appointed and commence duties. On 24 August, 1974 J. H. Willis received a Doctorate of Science from the University of Melbourne, having submitted his Handbook to Plants in Victoria Vol. I (2nd ed. 1970) and Vol. 2. (1973) as a major thesis, together with samples of his other scientific publications.

At home Willis's hobbies extend to collections of rocks, minerals, shells, coins, and postage stamps featuring plant life. His relatively large suburban garden, 73 metres in depth, is tended chiefly and enthusiastically by his wife Mavis, and in it, at most times of the year, it is possible to see 60 or more species flowering simultaneously. He has been a local preacher with the Methodist Church of Australia for 45 years and is in the choir of the Male Street Methodist Church, Brighton, which he and his wife both attend. They are both noted for their active participation in local aid organizations and for their lifetime of warm-hearted practical and sympathetic assistance to relatives, neighbours and friends. For six months in 1972 after Willis's retirement, he and his wife travelled to the British Isles, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Greenland. Retirement has seen no slackening in his diverse interests and activities, either in his personal or his professional life.



Fig. 1.-Localities in Australia and New Guinea where botanical collections and observations have been made by J. H. Willis.

BOTANICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY ACHIEVEMENTS.

Jim Willis's interest in everything pertaining to natural history, but particularly botany, commenced during his early childhood and has continued unabated to the present moment. His ten boyhood years at Stanley doubtless laid the foundations for a lifetime devoted to biological inquiry. Stanley nestles at the eastern foot of a sheer 150 metre basaltic bluff called "The Nut" although named Circular Head by Captain Matthew Flinders on 5 December 1798. There were high sea-cliffs, a deep harbour, magnificent ocean beaches, flowery heathlands, nearby tall forests and fern-gullies, and the adventuresome boy spent hours a day beach-combing or exploring the adjacent scrub and cliffs. The shells he collected were stored in a black-wood cabinet presented to him by Mr. & Mrs. Ted Edwards who had also been avid shell collectors. When he was ten his parents presented him with the fourth edition of J. A. Leach's *An Australian Bird Book*. His schoolmaster for his last three years of primary schooling, the late David L. Whitchurch, encouraged him to make a pressed collection of the district's grasses and indicate their various useful properties. On "The Nut", more than 100 kinds of native plants could still be found including the rare and interesting *Asplenium obtusatum*, *Cyathodes juniperina*, and *Helipterum albicans var. incanum*. At Christmas 1924, his brother Rupert gave him a copy of Leonard Rodway's *Tasmanian Flora* (1903) inscribed with appropriate verses, the first of which clearly indicates his early botanical interests:

"A budding young botanist, bent on botanical Study of flora (and fauna) Tasmanical, Went peering and poking and patiently prying, For specimens suited for pressing and drying."

Although he had left Tasmania by that time, he spent school holidays with his parents in Stanley and at Lilydale (near Launceston) where Rupert had recently set up in medical practice. At such times Rodway's flora was in constant use.

During his training at Creswick Willis spent much time on practical exercises in the plantation nursery and the indigenous State Forest nearby. He explored and camped with other students, and in September 1929 walked with Lawrie Webster from Dunkeld to Stawell through many parts of the Grampians. The next year he did a marathon walk of about 65 kilometres in one day, from Creswick westward to a forestry camp between Mounts Cole and Buangor. The Principal of the School of Forestry, Mr. Edwin J. Semmens, was an accomplished and inspiring biologist who further whetted Willis's interest in plant life, particularly the fungi. This encouragement strengthened his wish to eventually make botanical science a professional career.

Term holidays were mostly spent at Nathalia in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, where his father had been transferred in late October 1925. Thus, by the end of 1930 Jim Willis had a fair knowledge of the floristics of both the Creswick and Nathalia regions, and had made plant lists also for Sorrento, the Werribee Gorge, Mount Cole and a few other areas.

In each of the forestry districts to which he was appointed Willis enthusiastically examined and collected the plants of the region. At first his patrol work was done, very effectively, on a push-bike for which he received a small departmental allowance. It was not unusual for him to cover 50-65 kilometres per

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day by bicycle among the Dandenong Ranges and Gembrook-Beenak hills. Later, in 1936, he was instructed to patrol by horse.

Upon transferring to the National Herbarium in 1937 Willis entered a new phase of his botanical pursuits, with increased contact with both amateur and professional botanists and increased opportunities to visit new areas. He made his first trip to the Victorian Alps in January 1938, in the company of the late Raleigh A. Black. During the 1940's and early 1950's he shared many fruitful excursions into East Gippsland with the late Norman A. Wakefield. Four other enthusiastic amateur botanists and collectors, met in the course of his official duties at the Herbarium, have remained long-standing friends, viz. Miss Jean Galbraith of Tyers (via Traralgon), A. Cliff Beauglehole of Portland, Keith Rogers of Wulgulmerang and Tom Henshall of Red Cliffs (now at Alice Springs.) A rewarding correspondence was maintained with several older interstate and overseas botanists whose assistance was unstinted. These included Sir John B. Cleland in mycology and J. M. Black (Adelaide), C. A. Gardner (Perth), C. T. White and S. T. Blake (Brisbane), R. H. Anderson and Rev. H. M. R. Rupp (Sydney), moss specialists G. O. K. Sainsbury (Wairoa, New Zealand) and E. B. Bartram (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.)—all now deceased.

Willis's botanical reconnaissances and exploratory trips have taken him all over Victoria and to various parts of all the other Australian States, as well as to New Guinea, but he has seen comparatively little of Queensland. Particularly fruitful journeys were to: Western Australia with the late Sir Russel Grimwade's Expedition in September 1947; the Recherche Archipelago, W.A. (November 1950); Tasman Peninsula, Tas. (April, 1954); Central Australia (September 1965, July 1966, May-June 1974); Cocoparra Range National Park, N.S.W. (September 1969); Mount Wilhelm, New Guinea (June 1970); the Kimberleys and Hamersley Range, W.A., with A. C. Beauglehole (July-August 1974). In addition he visited both islands of New Zealand during the 40th ANZAAS meeting at Christchurch in January-February While Australian Botanical Liaison Officer at Kew, 1968. England, in 1958-59 he visited practically every botanical institution in the United Kingdom, and several on the European continent, making lasting personal contacts with many British, Dutch, and Scandinavian botanists. On the way back to Australia he spent three botanical weeks in the United States of America, visiting Washington, New York, the Boston-Cambridge area in Massachusetts and several parts of central California.

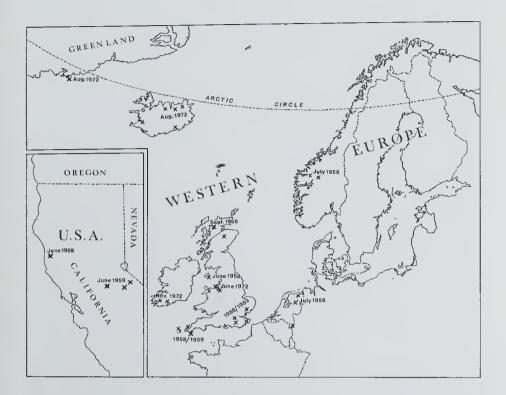


Fig. 2.-Localities in Western Europe and United States of America where botanical collections and observations have been made by J. H. Willis.

Willis has a great interest in biographical and historical topics. He has assiduously built up a file of biographical data on persons connected with Australian botany and the information he has gathered was made available to the compilers from the Australian Academy of Sciences in Canberra who prepared the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation's collection of biographical sketches.* For several years in the mid 1940's Willis aided his brother's wife, Margaret, in collecting material for her book *By Their Fruits* (Angus & Robertson, 1949), a biography of the great botanist Ferdinand von Mueller. He has also built up an extensive collection of handwritings of persons and collectors associated with Australian botany.

Throughout his career Jim Willis has actively participated in the work of many committees and organizations, both amateur and professional, and has given unstintingly of his time and talent to all. His scientific, natural history and horticultural affiliations include ordinary membership of the Royal Society of Victoria, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Australian Conservation Foundation, David G. Stead Memorial Wildlife Research Foundation, Weed Science Society of Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association, and Save the Dandenongs League, while he holds honorary life membership of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (Victorian Region), Native Plants Preservation Society of Victoria, Brighton Horticultural Society and Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. He first joined the latter organization on 12 December, 1932; several years later he became enthusiastically involved in the Club's activities, edited the Victorian Naturalist for two years (May 1948–April 1950) and is still a member of council. He has taken numerous photographic transparencies in colour and frequently uses these for illustrating botanical lectures and natural history travelogues given freely to sundry organizations, scientific and otherwise. To date his total writings (books, pamphlets, papers, essays, obituaries, reviews and notes) amount to 748, of which 175 are contributions to the Victorian Naturalist over a period of forty years. For the ten volumes of The Australian Encyclopaedia (1958) he wrote 452 separate entries, chiefly botanical, but including several biographies. Among all these writings are the original descriptions of 42 new species of Australian plants, also 20 other new species described in collaboration with fellow botanists, the descriptions of several new varieties, and many new nomenclatural combinations. Willis has made the first known collections in Victoria of 24 species of vascular plants, 30 bryophytes, 46 larger fungi and several lichens. For "special study and for increasing knowledge and appreciation of natural history in Australia" he was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion for 1960. In 1973 he received the Royal Society of Victoria's silver medal for research. In January 1974 the Faculty of Science, Monash University, appointed him an honorary Fellow. His Doctorate of Science, conferred in August 1974 by the University of Melbourne, has already been mentioned.

The name of James Hamlyn Willis is perpetuated in those of—Grevillea willisii Smith & McGillivray (a'sprawling shrub of north-east Victoria), Epilobium willisii Raven & Engelhorn (a subalpine willow-herb of Victoria and Tasmania), Oleanites willisii I. Cookson (a fossil olive from the older lignites at Yallourn), Pottia willisii G.O.K. Sainsbury (a minute moss from Standley chasm, Central Australia) and Steccherinum willisii M. Geesteranus (an interesting hydnoid fungus from the Lamington National Park, south-east Queensland).

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY J. H. WILLIS

1928—Polyporaceae in the Creswick Forest. *Sylvanite (Dec.): 54-55.

1929—Notes on the flora of the Werribee Gorge. Sylvanite (Dec.): 35-36. 1930—A bird's-eye view of the Creswick flora. Sylvanite (Dec.): 40–43.

- Impressions of the Grampians. Sylvanite (Dec.): 39-41 (in collab. L. G. Webster).
- 1934—The fairyland of fungi. Sun Nature Book 5 ("Gems of the Bush"): 53.
- The Agaricaceae or "Gilled Fungi". Victorian Naturalist 50: 264-298, tt. xlii-xlv (2 in col.) + 10 text fig. ef-steak ", "Punk" and "Blackfellows"
- "Beef-steak ", "Punk " Bread " Victorian Naturalist 50: 298-301, tt. xlvi & xlvii + 2 text fig. "Vegetable Caterpillars". Victorian Naturalist 50: 302-304, 1 text
- fig.
- Species gathered during a fungus foray. Victorian Naturalist 51: 46-48.
- The Geastrae or "Earth-stars" of Victoria. Victorian Naturalist 51: 115-124, t. xxiv + 3 text fig. Two remarkable fungi of the springtime (Morchella conica & Gyro-
- mitra esculenta). Victorian Naturalist 51: 172-174, 2 text fig.
- 1935—Revision of the Agaricaceae or "Gilled Fungi." Victorian Naturalist 52: 68-70.
 List of fungi from Sherbrooke Forest excursion (supplied to and published by H.C.E. Stewart). Victorian Naturalist 52: 76.
 Plant life in the Northern Goulburn Valley. Victorian Naturalist 52: 140 144 to the latest for the second secon
- 140–144, t. xv. + 1 text fig.
- Notes on the illustrations of fungi (by M. I. Howie). Victorian 1936 Naturalist 53: 21-22.
- 1937—Spring-time fungi and a giant Boletus. Victorian Naturalist 54: 102– 104, 1 text fig.
- 1938—A suburban colony of "Earth-stars". Victorian Naturalist 54: 143-144, 1 text fig.
- Excursion to Humphries' Hill, Frankston. Victorian Naturalist 54: 144, (in collab. Dr. E. I. McLennan).
- 1939-April fungi of the forest gullies and the genus Poria. Victorian Naturalist 56: 3-8, 3 text fig. The occurrence of Astelia nervosa in Victoria (incl. var. australiana
- var. nov.). Kew Bulletin 1939: 173–177.
- 1940—Fungus haunts and habits. Wild Life (Melbourne) 2 (7): 7-9 & 46, 1 full-page + 4 text figs.
- A western variety of Pultenea Muelleri (var. reflexifolia, var. nov.). Victorian Naturalist 57: 98-99, 1 text fig.
- 1941—Victorian Fungi (—72 pp., 33 illust., publ. Field Nats. Club Vict.). Victoria's floral emblem. Victorian Naturalist 58: 67–70.
- Crimson-berries survive on the cliffs at Woolamai. Victorian Naturalist 58: 78, t. viii.
- 1942-The Tree Everlasting (Helichrysum ferrugineum Less.). Victorian Naturalist 58: 163-164.
- Notes on Victorian Rhamnaceae. Part 1 (incl. Pomaderris velutina, sp. nov.). Victorian Naturalist 58: 175-177, 1 text fig. Certain Victorian plants urgently needed for assay-by C.S.I.R.
- Victorian Naturalist 58: 181.
- Notes on Victorian Rhamnaceae. Part 2 (a. Pomaderris velutina; b. Discaria australis). Victorian Naturalist 59: 67-69.

* Magazine of the Victorian Old Forestry Students' Association.

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	 Botanical "Bulls". Victorian Naturalist 59: 72. Confused taxonomy in the Ozothamnus section of Helichrysum, and its rectification. Victorian Naturalist 59: 84-88 (in collab. P. F. Marrie).
	Morris). The wonder-lily of Beenak (Astelia nervosa). Victorian Naturalist 59: 90–91.
	The correct name of our Alpine Podolepis (P. acuminata R. Br. var. robusta Maid. & Betche) comb. nov. Victorian Naturalist 59 : 120.
	Classifying and mapping of Victorian vegetation. Quarterly Supple- ment to "The Gum Tree" 2 (1): 2-4. Plants of the marshes. Victorian Naturalist 59: 144.
1943-	-Curious distribution of plants (in Brisbane Ranges). Victorian
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	collab. P.N.S. Bibby).
—	Trachymene and Platysace. Victorian Naturalist 60: 40-41. Plant Names Sub-committee. First list of recommended new and changed vernaculars. Victorian Naturalist 60: 125-126.
1944-	-Dryopteris pennigera, a new fern record for Victoria. Victorian
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	Review of "The Orchids of New South Wales" by H.M.R. Rupp. Victorian Naturalist 61: 22 (in collab. W. H. Nicholls).
	Excursion to Seaholme. Salt-marsh flora and mangroves. Victorian Naturalist 61: 40-41.
	 Loss of Berlin Herbarium. Victorian Naturalist 61: 93. Plant Names Sub-committee. Second list of recommended new and changed vernaculars. Victorian Naturalist 61: 127–128. Flower perfumes and their classification. Victorian Naturalist 61:
	131–136. A new combination of <i>Helichrysum</i> , <i>H. thyrsoideum</i> (DC.) comb.
1945-	nov. Victorian Naturalist 61: 147 (in collab. P. F. Morris). -Excursion to Beaumaris. Regeneration of plants on fire area. Vic-
	torian Naturalist 61: 162–163. More Botanical "Bulls". Victorian Naturalist 61: 175. Toorongo sub-alpine flora. Victorian Naturalist 61: 176–180, t.vii +
	text fig. Chlorophytum, a genus of lilies new to Victoria (and New South
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	The Mallee Everlasting in New South Wales. Victorian Naturalist 62: 42.
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1946-	-The Barry Mountains. Victorian Naturalist 62: 155. Your National Herbarium, what it is and what it does. Wild Life 8 (1): 19-22, 9 text fig.
	Some desirable changes among familiar vernacular names. Victorian Naturalist 62: 241–242.
	Fascinating western eucalypts. Wild Life 8 (11 & 12): 389–393 & 436–439, 22 text fig.

<u> </u>	Some unpublished comments on a Mitchell journal. Victorian
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1947—	-An undescribed Victorian phalloid fungus (Mutinus cartilagineus, sp. nov.). Victorian Naturalist 63: 217-219, t. xvi + 1 text fig.
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	Australian flowers for Australian gardens. Wild Life 9 (6): 220–223, 9 text fig.
	 Plants of Rodondo Island. Victorian Naturalist 64: 21-24. Flora of the Mud Islands, Port Phillip Bay. Memoirs of the National Museum, Melbourne 15: 138-143.
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	Vascular flora of the Lake Mountain alps. Victorian Naturalist 65: 14-17.
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	Beenak fungus foray. Victorian Naturalist 65: 69–70. On the nature and distribution of "Moonah" (Melaleuca pubescens Schauer). Victorian Naturalist 65: 76–84, 2 text fig.
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	gress in Stockholm (Allocarya E. L. Greene v. Maccoya F.
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1949-	-Victorian fern and clubmoss records. Victorian Naturalist 65: 214-217 (in collab. N. A. Wakefield).
	List of plant species for Snowy River Gorges. Walkabout 15 (2): 41.
	Victorian fern and clubmoss records. Victorian Naturalist 65: 279– 281 (in collab. N. A. Wakefield).
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	America sets a new record in plant longevity. Victorian Naturalist
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	The chequered story of two Tasmanian mosses, Tayloria Gunnii (Wils. in Hook.) comb. nov. & T. tasmanica (Hampe) Broth. Victorian Naturalist 67: 30-35, 1 text fig. Review of "Classification of Animals" by W. T. Calman. Victorian
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_	Melbourne's mangroves are dead! Victorian Naturalist 67: 205. Vale, William Henry Nicholls (1885–1951) (Obit.). Victorian Naturalist 67: 241–243, 1 text fig.
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	William Henry Nicholls (Obit.). Wild Life 13 : 456–458, 1 text fig. Concerning Red-backed Spiders. Victorian Naturalist 68 : 18, Among plants of the Recherche. Walkabout 17 : 35–40, 7 illust. Sydenham Sanctuary for vanishing basalt flowers. Walkabout 17 :
	36–37, 3 illust. A new species of Victorian moss (Fissidens hunteri, sp. nov.). Vic- torian Naturalist 68: 83–84, 1 text fig.
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	Notes on two West Australian Stylidia (incl. Stylidium choreanthum sp. nov.). Victorian Naturalist 72: 171–172, 1 text fig. (in collab.
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 $[\]dagger$ These three papers brought together in booklet form, Apr. 1964. by Mrs. C. Coleman for the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia.

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